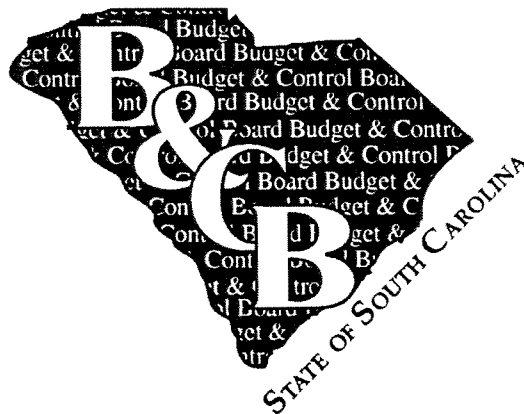


May 28, 2004

State Government News Summary



Prepared by the Budget and Control Board
Office of the Executive Director



Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004

State budget final as Senate finishes overriding vetoes

JIM DAVENPORT
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. - The state's \$5.5 billion budget is law after the Senate overrode all but six of Gov. Mark Sanford's vetoes on Thursday.

With the House sustaining one veto Wednesday as it zoomed through Sanford's 43-page veto message, the General Assembly agreed with the governor on just seven of his 106 vetoes.

Sanford won mostly minor fights in the spending plan, which pays off a \$155 million deficit from two years ago and gives state workers a 3 percent, across-the-board raise, their first in two years. The budget takes effect July 1.

Sanford did not immediately respond to questions. His spokesman, Will Folks, said the governor wouldn't comment on specific vetoes "until the process is completed" in the Legislature.

On Wednesday, the House agreed that a workers compensation fund shouldn't be run the state Insurance Department, which also would be responsible for regulating it.

Among the vetoes sustained by the Senate were:

_ That the Department of Social Services should have more flexibility in dealing with budget reduction through the way it handles child care reimbursements;

_ That the Aeronautics Commission shouldn't be moved from control of the Commerce Department and into the Transportation Department;

_ And that the State Law Enforcement Division shouldn't be able to raise fines to \$5,000 on video gambling machines it seizes.

Sanford said the latter provision denied due process for those accused of breaking the video gambling law. Still, "I believe those who would illegally operate illegal machines should face punitive fines," the governor said in his veto message.

"I think the governor was dead on the money," Senate President Pro Tem Glenn McConnell, R-Charleston, said.

It was a much better outcome for Sanford than on Wednesday when the Republican governor pulled House Speaker David Wilkins, R-Greenville, off the floor to complain about the lack of debate on his vetoes.

Things didn't start so well Thursday, either.

Sanford carried two squealing piglets - named "Pork" and "Barrel" - under his arms up the steps to the lobby outside the House and Senate to decry what he saw as pork in the budget. Most lawmakers blasted it as a stunt and some said it would make the butt of jokes nationally.

As much as Sanford huffed and puffed, though, the Senate still mostly blew his vetoes down.

For instance, his vetoes on nearly \$250,000 earmarked for an Upstate hot air balloon festival and \$380,000 for a college football bowl game in Charleston ultimately were overridden.

Keri Hall, executive director of Freedom Weekend Aloft, told the Anderson Independent-Mail she wasn't aware that the money was headed to the event and said it would be the biggest state grant for the program in its 23 years.

"It's always great to get that type of support from the city, county or state, but it's never something we plan on," Hall said.

The Palmetto Bowl "is one of the greatest investments we can make," Senate Finance Committee Chairman Hugh Leatherman, R-Charleston, said. The \$380,000 would improve The Citadel's football facilities. No state money would go into that until the state is guaranteed at least a \$1 million return in tax collections, Leatherman said.

Another item Sanford lost was the \$5 million taken from a beach renourishment program at Hunting Island State Park.

In all, the Senate gave discussion to a little over a dozen items on Sanford's list.

Still, Folks said Sanford "appreciates the Senate actually discussing those vetoes based on their merits."

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Posted on Fri, May. 28, 2004

Sanford's pigs leave lawmakers squealing

Governor's little jokes backfire, infuriate legislators as budget dispute boils over

By JENNIFER TALHELM and VALERIE BAUERLEIN
Staff Writers

Sandwiched between two squirming, squealing piglets, Gov. Mark Sanford walked up the State House steps to take a light-hearted jab at the Legislature about pork in the state budget.

But, instead, the stunt infuriated lawmakers, who took it as a direct insult and an attempt to embarrass them, further eroding their rocky relationship with the governor.

The move came a day after House members angered Sanford in what has become an ongoing clash over the \$5.5 billion state budget.

With cameras rolling and lawmakers and lobbyists gaping, Sanford stood just outside the House chambers, pigs wriggling under his arms, pig feces on his jacket and shoes, and criticized House members for burying pork-barrel projects in the budget.

House members on Wednesday angered Sanford by accepting just one of his 106 vetoes of items in the state budget. Sanford also criticized lawmakers for relying on the sale of property — and not savings — to pay down the last \$16 million of a \$155 million deficit.

"Pork won and taxpayers lost," Sanford said. "I find it unbelievable to think there's not one additional dollar in savings that could go to pay down that unconstitutional \$16 million debt."

House leaders countered quickly, saying Sanford had taken a previously genteel argument over fiscal responsibility to a new low.

"It's beneath the dignity of the governor to bring pigs in the State House outside the chamber just to get a photo opportunity," said House Speaker David Wilkins, his jaw set, his eyes down. "This is the people's House. He defiled it."

Sen. Jake Knotts, R-Lexington, defended the governor.

"Sometimes we have to embarrass people to make them understand what they have done," he said.

Legislators, outraged in general, seized on the fact that the pigs had defecated on the carpet and the marble floor.

The State House reopened about five years ago after a \$50 million renovation, and animals other than guide dogs are not allowed in the building. Some noted that if anybody other than the governor had brought an animal into the State House, he would have been arrested.

"It's the poorest taste I've ever seen in 32 years," said Sen. Verne Smith, R-Greenville. "To bring pigs in here to mess up the carpet, it's way beneath the dignity of the governor."

Sanford's news conference lasted just 10 minutes. At the end, the governor, who said he spent summers growing up on a farm, swiftly scooped up the piglets — dubbed "Pork" and "Barrel" — and marched back to his office.

The governor's staff — all wearing suits — shoved the animals back into their crate and rushed them out the West Wing exit.

Sanford's press secretary, Will Folks, and his speech writer, Joel Sawyer, returned with bottles of cleanser and paper towels to clean up the pigs' droppings while a custodian supervised.

Sanford called the appearance an attempt to have fun with the issue, but lawmakers and the governor have clashed throughout this legislative session. The back-and-forth had turned increasingly shrill this week.

Legislators were irked that Sanford would veto 106 items in the state budget, especially when they based the spending plan on a proposal he sent them in January. Several said they had never worked with a governor who struck more than a few dozen items.

On Wednesday, the House whizzed through Sanford's vetoes, overriding 105 in just 99 minutes. About mid-afternoon, a frustrated Folks called the House's actions a "mockery of the legislative process" and "a slap in the face."

Sanford backed away from those statements hours later, saying he wasn't taking the overrides personally. The next day, he camped outside the House doors holding piglets and criticizing lawmakers' approach to the budget.

"There are just natural points we agree on and natural points we disagree on," Sanford said. "We've got to have fun with this process."

But Sen. Scott Richardson, R-Beaufort, said the relationship between the Legislature and the governor needs to change.

"It's pretty much to a fever pitch," he said, "and I think everybody's sick of it."

News that pigs were in the State House whirled through the Legislature. Within an hour, it had spread to downtown businesses, where people laughed and shook their heads. Many predicted South Carolina again would look backward on national news.

"That's just over the edge," said Blease Graham, a USC political scientist. "It's reckless; it tarnishes our national image."

Indeed, video of Sanford and the pigs was the lead item on CNN's "Inside Edition" political news show.

Others were stunned that Sanford had broken an unspoken code in South Carolina politics: We may disagree, but we avoid directly embarrassing each other.

"This about tears it with the General Assembly," said Francis Marion University political scientist Neal Thigpen, a Republican. "There's no going back. They don't like being embarrassed."

Senators, who took up Sanford's vetoes Thursday, joked about what the governor would do once they were done deliberating.

"Maybe he was sending us a message," said Sen. Brad Hutto, D-Orangeburg. "If we rush through these vetoes, he'll bring four pigs up here."

As for the mess the pigs made on the floor, Knotts gave Sanford the benefit of the doubt.

"The governor didn't mean for the pigs to do what they done. If you pick up a pig and squeeze it, something's going to come out. I'm sure the governor didn't know that."

Staff writer Lee Bandy and The Associated Press contributed to this report.



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The Greenville News

Sanfords pig caper raises a stink

Posted Thursday, May 27, 2004 - 9:34 pm

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By Dan Hoover

STAFF WRITER

dhoover@greenvillenews.com

Gov. Mark Sanford brought live pigs into the House chamber Thursday to make a point about pork barrel spending but ended up with a bipartisan firestorm hot enough for a barbecue.

"Insulting" and "childish," said House Speaker David Wilkins, R-Greenville. "This is beneath the dignity of the Governor's Office, and I am embarrassed for him."

Minority Leader James Smith, D-Columbia, said, "I don't know if (Sanford) has any credibility or reputation left that gives him any ability to lead."

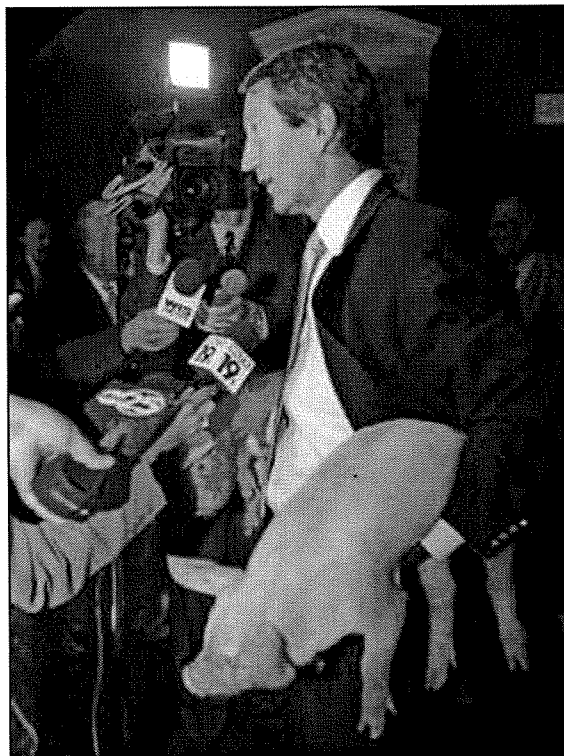
Adding insult to injury, one of the pigs promptly defecated on the marble floor of House lobby after Sanford put them down.

"Unfortunately, they weren't housebroken," Wilkins said.

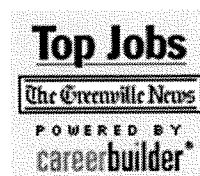
The incident came a day after Sanford reacted angrily to the House's rapid-fire override of all but one of his 106 budget vetoes, saying members acted recklessly.

No regrets

He told *The Greenville News* Thursday afternoon that his effort to inject humor into a serious constitutional issue over an unbalanced budget hadn't backfired, despite legislators'



South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford holds two piglets in the Rotunda of the Statehouse Thursday. Sanford was protesting the fast action by House members to override his budget vetoes. AP Photo/Lou Krasky



outrage.

"I think the average guy out there will get it," he said.

Wilkins didn't.

He issued a stinging rebuke to Sanford, saying, "The governor stood outside our chamber and practiced the worst kind of politics."

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Wilkins said the House had passed 12 of 16 bills on Sanford's "Checklist for Change" and will continue to process important legislation "without engaging in the insulting, childish pranks of the governor."

Sanford's vetoes included changes in how the state might spend \$90 million expected from tougher tax law enforcement. He cut about \$21 million of that out of the spending plan, saying expectations may be too high and agencies shouldn't count on that money.

Among the vetoes were some to trim about \$16 million elsewhere to generate the rest of the money to eliminate a \$155 million deficit left from two years ago. South Carolina's constitution mandates unbalanced budgets.

Unwelcome precedent

"We've got to close that gap and I laid it out in our budget vetoes. It wasn't debated," he said, adding that by leaving it in place "we set precedent for 50 governors and legislative bodies from now."

Sanford said, "There's money for people's pork projects in different parts of the state, but there's no money to address this deficit still hanging over our heads."

There was little support for the porcine ploy.

House Majority Leader Rick Quinn, a Republican who voted to sustain a number of Sanford's vetoes, said the incident "does nothing but make it harder to get his agenda passed."

The pig caper has serious implications for Sanford's relations with the Legislature over the 30 remaining months of his term, said Neal Thigpen, a Francis Marion University political scientist, Republican activist and former State Election Commission chairman.

"It's not just busted but probably broken permanently," Thigpen said.

'It smells bad'

Rep. Bob Leach, R-Greenville, said Sanford "appeared out on the floor with two small pigs under his arms. Then he sat them down and one of the pigs crapped all over the floor and we've had to clean it. It smells bad there."

Leach said the "embarrassing situation" has brought relations between Sanford and the House to a new low and "lowered the professionalism of the Governor's Office to an all-time low. It was unnecessary and uncalled for."

"It's going to be very, very hard to work with him after this," Leach said, adding that "I don't know if anything else will be accomplished at all. People have lost a lot of respect for him."

"The governor needs to take his medication," said Rep. Jim Harrison, R-Columbia, Judiciary Committee chairman.

"The House has made a good faith effort to work with him this year and that may not be there next year," Harrison said.

Smith, the minority leader, said what had been a disagreement over issues had been turned into something personal by Sanford, triggering Wilkins' strong response.

"Everyone knows the governor and the speaker haven't always gotten along."

Wilkins said in an interview he would continue to try to work with Sanford, a fellow Republican, "but this certainly doesn't help."

'P-1 and P-2'

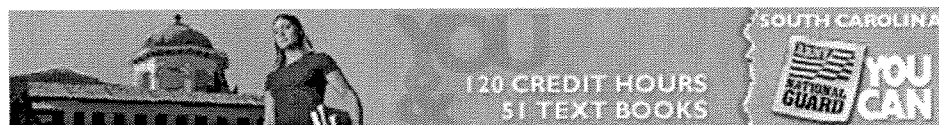
Sanford's office issued a whimsical statement afterward, noting that the pigs, nicknamed "Pork" and "Barrel" (State Law Enforcement Division code names "P-1" and "P-2"), were brought to the Statehouse to symbolize the need for real spending reform in South Carolina.

Joe Erwin, state Democratic Party chairman, said "it should be crystal clear that we need a change in leadership in Columbia."

He added that "it is unfortunate that Sanford's spokesman, Will Folks, actually had to clean up the pig poop from the marble floors of the Statehouse today. However, in some ways, it is appropriate since Folks has to clean up behind this governor on a regular basis."

—

Dan Hoover covers politics and can be reached at 298-4883.



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HILTON HEAD ISLAND - BLUFFTON S.C.

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Vetoes slow decision on erosion

Senate still to weigh in on Hunting Island bill

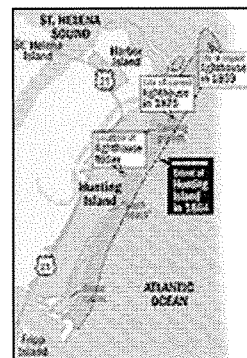
BY GREG HAMBRICK, *Special to The Packet*

Published Thursday, May 27th, 2004

BEAUFORT -- Hours after Gov. Mark Sanford vetoed spending \$5 million to slow beach erosion on Hunting Island, the state House overrode his decision, and the Senate may be poised to follow suit as early as today.

In his veto letter to the legislature, the governor cited several reasons -- including the environmental dangers of renourishment and a state law that calls for naturalism -- why he thinks "renourishment on Hunting Island is not the kind of investment that our state should be making."

The money for Hunting Island State Park was one of 105 vetoes the House quickly overturned Wednesday. According to state Sen. Scott Richardson, R-Hilton Head Island, the Senate may start overriding the vetoes today.



Ken Hawkins/Special to The Packet

[+ Enlarge Image](#)

"The governor went wholesale after everyone," Richardson said of the vetoes. "The sentiment right now is that we're going to override a good number of those."

Rep. Catherine Ceips, R-Beaufort, worked quickly Wednesday to overturn the veto and said she would "appeal to (senators) to save the beach."

With \$3.2 million in state money earmarked for the project, the additional \$5 million would complete funding for a project to help slow the beach's erosion rate from 15 feet a year to 6 feet a year, according to park officials. The project would add sand to the beach and build groins to protect against erosion.

In his veto letter, Sanford partly explained his decision by saying a major hurricane would "completely wipe out a nourishment project such as this."

But protecting a beach from storm damage is one of the main goals of nourishment, said Chris Brooks, deputy commissioner for the state Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management.

"The best protection from a storm would be a healthy, wide beach," Brooks said.

Richardson also questioned some of Sanford's reasoning.

In rejecting the Hunting Island project, the governor also cited a state law that calls for allowing natural erosion in areas where structures are not endangered. Brooks, however, said the law does not apply to Hunting Island.

"We're not talking about a nature preserve," he said. "We're talking about a state park."

The governor's concerns about the environmental implications of building groins also are unfounded, Brooks said.

Groins are sand-trapping structures built perpendicular to the beach that are intended to ward off erosion. But there is debate over whether they merely shift erosion down the coast without protecting the target beach.

"That's just not going to happen with a well-engineered project," Brooks said.

He said in order for the park to continue being successful, there needs to be a stable solution to its beach erosion.

"One thing is clear, the longer we wait the more expensive the solution will be," he said.

Marion Edmonds, spokesman for the state Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, said the department will follow the governor's lead on the issue.

With few of the state's parks generating a profit, the \$600,000 Hunting Island collects from retail sales, camping, cabins and admission fees goes to other state parks that are maintained at a loss.

"(Sanford) didn't question the dollars and cents of Hunting Island," Edmonds said, "but the broader philosophical question of renourishment."

Will Folks, the governor's spokesman, said the state "should pursue federal funding instead of state dollars that are stretched increasingly thin."

Park officials who have worked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to get federal funds have said money from Washington seems unlikely.

Bill Eiser, an oceanographer for the state, said South Carolina gave an average of \$2.5 million every year during the 1990s to help pay for nourishment projects on Myrtle and Folly beaches and Sullivans and Pawleys islands. But recent state budget problems have curtailed new nourishment money.

Hilton Head Island received more than \$6 million from the state toward a \$9 million beach nourishment in 1990. The town's last beach nourishment, at a cost of \$9 million in 1997, was paid for using money collected from a local 2 percent tax on overnight lodging. The island's next \$15 million renourishment project, to begin in 2005, also will be paid for with the tax money.

"We do that because of the uncertainty in ever finding state funds again," town administrator Steve Riley said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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Posted on Fri, May. 28, 2004

Sanford, lawmakers are keeping it real

You can have reality television.

Forget that cloying sing-off between Fantasia and Diana on "American Idol." Forget all those smarmy ladder-climbers on "The Apprentice." Forget the collection of freaks that turn up on "Survivor" every season.

Nothing can top the real-life reality show that's taking place in the State House as the legislative session comes to a close.

Even conniving manipulators like Omarosa and Boston Rob wouldn't stand a chance in the battles between the House, the Senate and the governor's office, where many relationships are now mired in deep doo-doo.

The mudslinging — at least it looked something like mud — reached a crescendo this week when Senate Democrats shut down the governor's proposed income tax cut with a filibuster the Republicans couldn't halt. Meanwhile, over in the House, the governor sent the proposed budget back to House members with a whopping 106 vetoes. House members countered by overriding 105 of those vetoes in 99 minutes. That's an average of 1.06 overrides per minute, which, according to the legislative manual, set a new House record.

A war of words quickly followed, as the governor's spokesman, Will Folks, dismissed House leaders for their "mockery" and for being "more interested in being the mayor of Importantville."

(Wait a second, Talk, an expert in mockery, always thought that we were the mayor of Importantville. Has there been some sort of recall election?)

Sanford himself called the overrides "reckless." Sort of like an Andre Bauer truck ride down Assembly.

But the House members were equally incredulous over the 106 vetoes, far more than the 22 vetoes Sanford had last year. That's a jump even more stunning than Barry Bonds going from 49 homers to a record-breaking 73 homers over a single season.

Talk has learned legislators believe Sanford's veto pen might have been corked. Or that he was getting mail-order "nutritional supplements" from BALCO.

We're sure his newfound veto power has nothing to do with gubernatorial steroid use. His glistening new physique can probably just be attributed to all that cross-state bike-riding.

But you have to wonder what prompted Sanford's next move, when he showed up at the State House the following day with a piglet under each arm as a way of taunting legislators about pork spending.

He stood right there at the House chamber doors as the pigs did what pigs do all over his shoes and coat. That left his spinmeister Folks to clean up the mess. (Just wondering, does that make him the mayor of Poopville?)

Next it was House Speaker David Wilkins' turn to be furious. He accused Sanford of defiling the State House in order to get TV coverage. You know, the Speaker may be on to something there.

Gov. Sanford could be auditioning for his own reality show. Let's face it, this week's unscripted outrageousness is more entertaining than anything we've ever seen out of Simon Cowell, Donald Trump or Richard Hatch, the naked guy on "Survivor."

In fact, it wouldn't surprise us if Sanford — wearing only a pair of form-fitting bike shorts — showed up next week in the

final days of the legislative session with Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie on each arm.

They could be a part of a new season of "The Simple Life" in which folks across the nation get to laugh at the antics of the simpletons in our state government, which is now as stalled out as that old truck Paris and Nicole drive around in their show.

There's about as much chance of the Sanford administration getting anything meaningful passed these days as there is of another 3 Rivers Music Festival occurring next spring.

Unless, that is, we can get Fantasia to headline 3 Rivers. Maybe she can sing the theme song to the governor's new reality show:

"The Mayor of Importantville."

Call Talk at (803) 771-8643 or e-mail ntwhite@thestate.com.

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Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004

State to get money to buy new buses, expand service

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. - The state will receive about \$6.9 million to buy new buses for public transportation, U.S. Sen. Fritz Hollings announced Thursday.

The state Department of Transportation, which supports 18 transit systems in the state, will use the money to replace aging buses and expand service.

"More and more people every year use public transportation, and this upgraded bus fleet will move the people safely and efficiently," Hollings said.

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HILTON HEAD ISLAND - BLUFFTON S.C.

Southern Beaufort County's News & Information Source



S.C. to take part in research

BY JESSICA FLATHMANN, *The Island Packet*

Other stories by Jessica Flathmann

Published Thursday, May 27th, 2004

More research of aquatic animals in South Carolina and eight other states will be conducted under an agreement between the federal government and International Paper.

The company, which owns a couple hundred acres in Beaufort County and about 22,000 acres in Jasper County, agreed to work with the U.S. Department of the Interior through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct joint research on aquatic animals and their habitat.

"We need to work closely to protect endangered species ... on private lands," said Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton.

The 10-year agreement allows researchers to coordinate efforts.

"It allows us to partner with Fish and Wildlife Service to have their scientists work hand in hand with our scientists," said George O'Brien, International Paper's senior vice president of forest products.

Nearly one-third of the 500 native fish species in the southeastern United States are considered imperiled, and about three-fourths of the region's 270 species of mussels are in need of conservation.

The agreement calls for identification of areas to survey for aquatic species in trouble, determination of the best ways to protect water quality, establishment of programs to protect the species in trouble, reintroduction of species into suitable habitats and education to make the public aware of the species. The details of the research or what will come from its discoveries hasn't been determined.

The agreement covers the 5.5 million acres of International Paper forest land in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

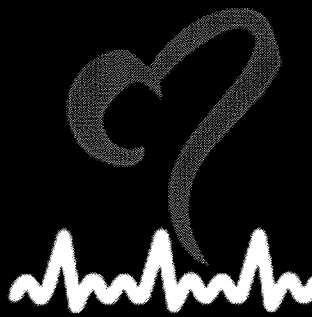
"What's found on our land has implications both upstream and downstream," O'Brien said.

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Posted on Fri, May. 28, 2004

Incubator move could bring higher-end jobs

By C. GRANT JACKSON
Business Editor

The USC Columbia Technology Incubator could double its size by moving to a city-owned building at 1225 Laurel St.

Mayor Bob Coble is expected to pitch the idea to Columbia City Council next week. The proposal would allow the incubator to move into the 4,000-square-foot building and occupy it essentially rent-free for up to seven years.

The incubator was created in 1999 to foster the development of high-tech companies. It has graduated 10 companies in five years that have created 250 jobs. Nine of those companies are still operating. All are in the Columbia area.

Incubator director Joel Stevenson couldn't say enough about the city's proposal.

"I don't have good enough adjectives," Stevenson said. "It is overwhelming. It means we are doing more than talking."

Coble said helping the incubator furthers the city's goal of creating jobs.

"Our greatest challenge is job creation," he said.

The mayor has called a jobs summit for June 4 to discuss how the region can stem a steady loss of jobs over the past four years.

Coble said he briefed city council members individually about the proposal. He believes they will approve the arrangement.

USC attorneys are poring over the fine print of a proposed lease agreement.

"We have no significant reservations. It is a very generous plan. In fact, we think the university can save a lot of money. Quite frankly, we will keep that money invested in the incubator program," said Harris Pastides, USC vice president for research.

The \$1-a-year lease would include the incubator paying for utilities, upkeep and insurance for the building, Pastides said.

The city is moving its Laurel street offices into the Washington Square building at Washington and Main streets. The city purchased the building last September.

The city has no immediate need for 1225 Laurel St., Coble said. Allowing the incubator to occupy the building for five years, with a two-year extension, would be an excellent use, he said.

The mayor previously said the building should be returned to the city's tax rolls. Coble said he still believes that, but he said the building's value will be much greater in five to seven years when the incubator moves out.

"With everything going on downtown, the property in five years could be worth a lot more," said Jim Gambrell the city's director of economic development. "It made sense for the city to retain ownership of the building and have it maintained."

Downtown Columbia is seeing a flurry of development. The new Meridian office tower has opened on Main Street. First Citizens Bank has announced it will put up a new office building at Main and Lady streets. Residential development also has taken off.

The incubator could be out of the Laurel Street building before the five years are up, Pastides said.

He expects to locate the incubator on the new USC research campus at some point.

"If the buildings go up as quickly as I think they will, you could see better incubator space on the research campus well before the five years is up," he said.

The incubator has about 20,000 square feet of leased space in two downtown buildings: 1233 Washington St. and 1334 Sumter St.

Twenty companies are in residence: Eight student-run companies and 12 non-student, or standard, companies.

The idea to move the incubator to Laurel Street came from long-time supporter Don Tomlin.

Tomlin, 56, a private investor, was instrumental in getting the incubator started. Since its inception, he has put more than \$500,000 into the incubator and related companies.

Tomlin said the incubator is Columbia's best chance to create high-impact, high-paying quality jobs.

"I guess the last six years have proved that," he said.

Tomlin is so committed to moving the incubator that he is even helping find space and arrange leases for companies that are having to move out of Washington Square.

The city had agreed to allow many of the companies in the building to remain until their leases were up.

Stevenson said the Laurel Street building will be ideal because it has many offices and a lot of meeting space. It also has the necessary communications infrastructure.

Stevenson is negotiating with the city to leave the "vintage World War II furniture" that is perfect for start-up companies. "There isn't anything too fancy in the building, and that is perfect," he said.

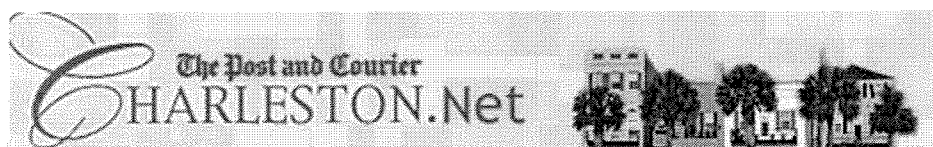
Moving to Laurel Street would allow the incubator to recruit more companies. The rent-free arrangement with the city would also give the incubator a sorely needed income stream that could be plowed into operations, Tomlin said.

The current incubator space is leased from building owner Pete Cannon. The incubator subleases to its companies. Almost 90 percent of what the incubator gets from the companies goes toward the lease with Cannon.

Providing more space and a permanent source of funding will help the incubator grow.

"We need to create a problem for Joel (Stevenson)." Tomlin said, "that problem being that for one time he has got a lot more space than he is occupying."

The challenge will be finding the companies in Columbia that can fill the space, Tomlin said.



Insurer's \$690M surplus draws criticism

BlueCross chief says company's reserves not excessive, could melt away quickly

BY JONATHAN MAZE

Of The Post and Courier Staff

Years of profits at BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina have allowed the state's dominant insurer to build a reserve surplus that's drawing some criticism.

The Columbia-based insurer's surplus totals \$690.6 million, far more than the \$750,000 the state Insurance Department requires licensed insurers to have in reserve and still well above the \$1.5 million level that might prompt the department to investigate the solvency of an insurer the size of BlueCross.

The growing surplus comes at a time of skyrocketing health care costs and a rising number of uninsured South Carolinians.

The insurer's critics say that it should do more to hold down premiums, which would make health insurance more affordable to more people.

In response, the company says the numbers look bigger than they truly are, and that its reserves could evaporate quickly.

"We do not have excessive reserves," Ed Sellers, BlueCross's CEO, said in a phone interview Thursday. "When I came here in 1987, the plan lost 50 percent of its reserves in two years.

"It can go very bad, very fast."

Profits at the 41 Blue Cross plans nationwide exceeded \$6 billion last year on \$183 billion in revenue, according to the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. The association had a total of \$31.9 billion in reserves.

BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina earned \$79.7 million in 2003 after taking in nearly \$1.2 billion in revenue.

North Carolina's BlueCross made nearly \$200 million last year, bringing that insurer's reserves to more than \$740 million, according to newspaper reports.

The North Carolina Blue Cross is a nonprofit company. BlueCross in South Carolina is a for-profit mutual company, owned by its fully-insured members.

The South Carolina insurer's finances have grown stronger in the last few years. Net income soared from \$29.5 million in 1999 to \$99.2 million in 2002

-- and a profit margin of more than 10 percent -- before dropping last year.

Sellers said the drop in income last year was simply a matter of coming down from an excellent year.

"All insurance companies are doing well," said Lynn Bailey, a health care economist in Columbia. "They're able to shift costs to the patient. If you could raise premiums by 13, 14, 15 percent the last few years, you should be doing well."

According to the Insurance Department figures, the company's performance last year yielded a profit of 6.7 percent. Sellers, however, said the company's margin is actually much lower than that because the department did not count another \$2.2 billion in revenues from a growing number of self-insured plans administered by BlueCross. Including those revenues yields a profit of 2.4 percent.

Sellers makes a similar argument about the insurer's surplus.

Insurance Department figures show that surplus is about 60 percent of company revenue.

David Mitchell, an analyst for insurance rating company A.M. Best, which gave BlueCross its top rating last year, said insurers typically strive to build a surplus that's 50 percent of revenue.

With a 60 percent cushion, Mitchell said, BlueCross is protected against an expected downturn in premium increases as pressure on insurers to control costs grows nationwide. "That's significant leverage," he said, noting that it would take a lot of problems to wipe the surplus out.

Sellers said the surplus is for the entire company, including plans it administers for the government and other insurers. Overall, total BlueCross revenue adds up to about \$4.7 billion a year. "Big is a relative number," Sellers said.

"You have to view it in the context of the total scale of the company," he said.

Nevertheless, because the surplus has been built amid huge increases in premiums, the figures have prompted complaints that the insurer isn't serious about controlling rising health care costs.

Dr. John Evans, president of the South Carolina Medical Association, believes BlueCross should refund members and bump up reimbursements to physicians.

With a dominant market position, Evans said, BlueCross could do more to reduce the number of uninsured in the state by holding down its rates.

Evans said he's amazed "that a company that purports to be helping the citizens of South Carolina is accumulating such large surpluses. Just in the Greenville area alone we have 40,000 people who are uninsured who would benefit from reducing premiums and a plan to get people insured."

The state Medical Association has joined a nationwide class- action lawsuit against the Blue Cross Association, including BlueCross of South Carolina, over what doctors claim are inadequate reimbursements.

Frank Knapp, president of the South Carolina Small Business Chamber of Commerce, said the insurer's surplus is an indication that the company isn't interested in resolving a growing crisis among small companies that can't afford to pay for employees' health benefits.

"The health insurance crisis is getting worse while they make money," Knapp said. "They could be a major player in solving the crisis, but they choose not to be and sit there and make money."

Sellers said his company is trying to control premiums. Rates will not go up as much this year as they did last year. And he blamed the problem on rising claims, pointing out that while BlueCross's operating revenues have nearly doubled in the last five years, so have its paid claims.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.charleston.net/stories/052804/bus_28blue.shtml



Tenenbaum unveils plan to help veterans

(Published May 27, 2004)

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) - Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Inez Tenenbaum said Thursday she has a plan to help veterans.

Tenenbaum said she would urge the Veterans Administration to adopt a more consumer-focused approach to serving veterans.

She proposed hiring more people to reduce the backlog of disability claims, saying 87,000 veterans have waited six months or more for a decision.

"It is time for Washington to stop telling veterans to wait in line, and for us to start telling the federal government to get in line," Tenenbaum said.

She also wants to increase the income eligibility limits for those who qualify to be served at the Veterans Affairs.

Tenenbaum said only half of all veterans use the G.I. Bill to help find a job because of the \$1,200 fee. She pledged to work to eliminate the fee and find more money to pay for veterans' tuition and books for college.

Tenenbaum faces Ben Frasier, a former police officer, in the Democratic primary on June 8.

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Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004

Gay marriage recognition ban nearly passes Senate

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. - For a while Thursday, the Senate gave final approval to a bill that would ban recognition of gay marriages in South Carolina.

It turned out to be a procedural error, but it still took about 30 minutes for Senate Democrats to get Republicans to agree to reconsider the successful voice vote.

Sen. Robert Ford, D-Charleston, had handed a note to the Senate's clerk's staff that would have held up the vote. But the note didn't reach the clerk before the bill was amended to include the gay marriage ban by Sen. Jim Ritchie, R-Spartanburg.

Ritchie apologized to Ford later. "It was not my intention to mislead the body in any way," Ritchie said.

"It was a mistake," Ford said.

Ford said that type of thing is one of the reasons it's important to pay attention in the waning hours of the legislative session, which ends next week.

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Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004

Ravenel calls for changes in medical and legal systems

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. - Republican U.S. Senate candidate Thomas Ravenel says sweeping changes in the medical and legal systems are needed to control health care costs.

"The health care industry is being hit by a perfect storm of a third-party pay system and junk lawsuits," said Ravenel, a Charleston real estate developer. "We must get rid of the hurricane which is the third-party pay system in America, and I will make it a priority when I go to Washington."

The plan will reign in the "predatory trial-lawyer system" that he said is to blame for out-of-control health care costs that have stifled business development.

Ravenel proposed:

_ Capping damage awards at \$250,000 in medical malpractice cases as an interim measure to halt "skyrocketing" medical costs driven by frivolous lawsuits.

_ Creating health courts, legal bodies empowered to quickly and fairly settle disputes between doctors and patients.

"These courts will be accessible without an attorney and without delays," he said.

Ravenel faces former Gov. David Beasley, former Attorney General Charlie Condon, U.S. Rep. Jim DeMint, Bluffton businesswoman Orly Benny Davis and Myrtle Beach Mayor Mark McBride in the Republican primary on June 8.

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Posted on Fri, May. 28, 2004

DeMint, Ravenel spending millions on Senate run

By LAUREN MARKOE
Washington Bureau

Polls show pair vying for second behind Beasley

WASHINGTON — Jim DeMint and Thomas Ravenel are spending campaign dollars like they are going out of style.

DeMint, the Republican congressman from Greenville, spent \$1.26 million in the seven-week period ending May 19, according to campaign finance reports that U.S. Senate candidates filed Thursday.

Several polls show DeMint is battling Charleston developer Ravenel for second place in the June 2 Republican primary and the chance to face front-runner David Beasley in the expected June 22 runoff.

Ravenel spent \$1.22 million and Beasley, the former governor from Society Hill, spent \$799,948.

The six Republicans and two Democrats in the race hope to succeed retiring U.S. Sen. Fritz Hollings, a Democrat from Charleston.

The "pre-primary" reports have Ravenel raising the most money of all S.C. candidates for U.S. Senate. But since most of his money is a \$1.25 million loan to himself — as opposed to donations from others — the amount he raised does not necessarily reflect his popularity. Ravenel had \$104,125 on hand on May 19, the end of the reporting period.

Beasley led all the other Republican candidates in fund raising, bringing in \$329,654. He had \$581,098 on hand.

In April, when Senate candidates handed in campaign finance reports for the first quarter of the year, Beasley led them all with \$1.2 million in donations. The report Senate candidates handed in Thursday is the second for Beasley, who was a late entry into the race in January.

These latest reports also show DeMint raising \$288,532 and having \$535,405 on hand. Most of his spending came from money already on hand.

Charlie Condon, the former state attorney general from Charleston, raised \$163,412, spent \$682,576 and had \$435,900 on hand.

The Federal Elections Commission requires candidates for federal office to report on their campaign finances every three months and to file special "pre-primary" reports covering a shorter period.

The leading Democrat in the race, Inez Tenenbaum of Lexington, the state superintendent of education, raised \$428,765, spent \$337,472 and had \$1.32 million in cash on hand.

She will face perennial candidate Benjamin Frasier of Wadmalaw Island in the Democratic primary. Efforts to contact Frasier to obtain his financial report were unsuccessful.

Republican Mark McBride, the mayor of Myrtle Beach, raised \$69,835, spent \$46,193 and had \$36,147 on hand. Efforts to contact Republican businesswoman Orly Benny Davis were unsuccessful.

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MyrtleBeachOnline.com

Posted on Fri, May. 28, 2004

ELECTION 2004 | JUNE 8 PRIMARY

'New' Condon unveils stance

By Joseph S. Stroud
Knight Ridder

The question, "How do you integrate faith and values into politics?" would have been red meat for the old Charlie Condon.

But when it came up at a debate, the new Condon listened politely as some of the other Republican candidates for the U.S. Senate railed against gay marriage and Hollywood values, defended the Bible against unnamed assailants and stirred a roomful of religious conservatives to applause.

Then Condon, the silver-haired former S.C. attorney general, began by saying he wanted to "echo" what one of the other candidates, former Gov. David Beasley, had said in describing an assault on traditional values under way in this country.

But Condon did so in terms that were much more subdued.

His answer, which drew no applause in an event sponsored by Bethany Christian Services, an anti-abortion group, might surprise anyone familiar with the old Charlie Condon who rarely missed an opportunity to push emotional buttons.

"I do really believe, as I'm sure everyone on this panel believes, that God does have a place on the public square," Condon said, speaking evenly. "And we're now in, I think, a very critical time in this state and this country's history. "We're now debating issues such as whether God should be in our Pledge of Allegiance, the meaning of marriage," he said. "Who would have thought that we're at the point now where there are significant portions of our population and media and opinion leaders that are even debating this question?"

This from a man who in 1994 suggested an "electric sofa" might be used to execute criminals at the same time; and who in January 2001 declared "open season" on home invaders, saying homeowners who killed them should not be prosecuted.

Condon, the 50-year-old Charlestonian who was South Carolina's attorney general from 1995 to 2003, suddenly seems more like the son of a prominent Charleston retailer and bearer of a Duke University law degree than he is.

Hard lessons

Whether Condon - who has worked as general counsel for a Mount Pleasant insurance company since leaving office - can live down the high profile he adopted as attorney general remains to be seen. He left office just over a year ago, soon after finishing third in the 2002 GOP gubernatorial primary, with 16 percent of the vote.

"His gubernatorial run was a disaster from his perspective," said University of South Carolina political science professor Brad Gomez. "So if he's going to make it out of the primary, he has to find a way to do so without necessarily making himself a lightning rod."

Condon doesn't share the theory that there is a "new" Charlie Condon. He said he simply is putting the hard lessons learned during the '02 campaign into action.

"I use the word communication," he said. "I really feel like - same person, same belief system, same consistency, same - you name it. But it just - not to point any fingers except the finger right here. ... I did not do a good job of communicating that." As he speaks, Condon is riding down U.S. 25 between Aiken and Edgefield in a large recreational vehicle dubbed the "Limited Government Express." On its sides are two giant images, one of smiling cowgirls from the "Cowgirl Hall of Fame" in Fort Worth, Texas, and another from a model rain forest constructed in Iowa. Both received money in recent federal budgets. Both are cited by Condon as examples of runaway federal spending.

Inside, Condon bemoans the excesses of government, sounding less like a candidate seeking attention than a man who

thinks Republicans in Congress -- and maybe even the White House - have lost touch with the values of voters who sent them there.

"I think there's a mind-set of whatever it takes to get re-elected kind of thing," he said. "You know, the prescription drug thing, I've seen the polls; it polls very well. And, of course, if you call my mother and ask her, 'Would it be a good idea to have prescription drugs paid for by the federal government?' Of course, you're going to say, 'Yes.' But I would like to think you ask her the next question: 'We're at war, running deficits of \$500 billion, would you be willing to sacrifice a bit now for the sake of the country?' She'd quickly say, 'Yes,' too."

On the issues

Quoting Thomas Jefferson - "The government is best which governs least" -- Condon says he wants to trim the size of the federal bureaucracy through "fiscal discipline" -- which he said means everything is on the table except military spending.

"Whatever the military says they need to defend the country, we've got to be prepared to give it to them," he said. "I say that we give the troops the stuff that they need to fight with, period."

Condon also would increase funding for No Child Left Behind, the president's education initiative, which critics say was not fully funded.

Most other federal programs should be considered for cuts, he said, to begin lowering the federal deficit.

Condon's desire to get a handle on spending doesn't preclude cutting taxes, however. If the first vote he faced in Washington called for making the president's tax cuts permanent, he said he would vote yes wholeheartedly.

So where would he find the savings to reduce the federal deficit? Condon would target fraud and waste, and try to slow the growth of "entitlement spending" programs like Social Security and Medicare.

He proposes lowering the cap on annual growth in Social Security and Medicare from its current level of 5.6 percent to 4.6 percent. If that affects benefits paid when the number of recipients balloons as the baby boom generation grows older, Condon says tough choices will have to be made.

Running on his record

Condon's attempt to shed the lightning rod image he acquired as attorney general is not an attempt to run from his record.

He speaks proudly of what he did as attorney general, saying he promoted victims' rights, helped speed up the death penalty appeals process and successfully pushed for longer mandatory sentences for violent offenders. The state's crime rate dropped significantly during his tenure, he said.

Condon said his experience working at the local law enforcement level would serve him well in the Senate, where homeland security and domestic terrorism are sure to be ongoing concerns.

There were times during his tenure as attorney general when his efforts to draw attention and his attempts to be effective seemed incompatible to law enforcement officials.

In early 2001, for example, after Condon declared "open season" on home invaders, he was criticized for his handling of a Walterboro case in which a woman was accused of stabbing her lover.

Condon decided not to prosecute the woman for murder because he thought she was defending herself in her home.

"I never agreed on this," Mike Devin, then Walterboro's police chief, said at the time. "I was not given the option to give an opinion. It just all of a sudden happened."

Condon said he was surprised when Devin objected. The decision not to prosecute elicited no objections from SLED, which had taken over the case, Condon said. And, after Devin objected, Condon said he sent the police chief a letter saying he was free to reopen the case. "He declined to."

Lexington County solicitor Donnie Myers said he knew some solicitors weren't comfortable with Condon's high-profile approach. But, Myers said, when he dealt directly with Condon, he felt the Charlestonian "did a pretty good job" as attorney general.

The same Charlie

The person who is perhaps most surprised and amused by all the discussion of "two Charlies" is Emily Condon, his wife of 24 years. A practicing physician who stayed in their home on Sullivan's Island with their four children when Condon was attorney general, Emily Condon said she has known only the thoughtful, even-tempered person she sees at home. "Since I've heard reporters say the "new Charlie Condon," I've always said, 'What are they talking about?'" she said.

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Posted on Fri, May. 28, 2004

Federal judge dismisses desegregation order

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. - Less than two weeks after the country honored the 50th anniversary of the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case, the Berkeley County School District had its 34-year-old desegregation order dismissed by a federal judge.

U.S. District Judge David Norton wrote that the district had "eliminated the vestiges of the former dual system and has achieved unitary status." He filed the order Wednesday in Charleston, closing a complaint filed against the school district in July 1970.

"This is a wonderful present," district spokeswoman Pam Bailey said Thursday. "It's the end of the school year today and the end of a 34-year-old shadow."

Berkeley County School District is now among six in South Carolina declared unified, The (Charleston) Post and Courier reported. There are 28 districts in the state under court desegregation orders.

The complaint was filed by the U.S. Justice Department 16 years after the U.S. Supreme Court declared segregation unconstitutional in the case of Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kan.. on May 17, 1954.

In 1970, the federal court ordered the Berkeley County School District to end dual systems in areas like student assignment, faculty, transportation, school construction, extracurricular activities and inter-district transfers.

Bailey said little happened until 1993 when retired schools Superintendent James Hyman talked to the Justice Department about what had to get done.

"He was the one who raised his hand and said, 'This is the right thing to do. We need to get this off the books,'" she said. "We certainly knew it was there, but the government wasn't following up."

When Hyman retired in 1997, his successor, Chester Floyd, made compliance a goal for the district.

Four years ago, the Justice Department and district started negotiations to "narrow any remaining areas of concern," according to the federal agency's motion for dismissal.

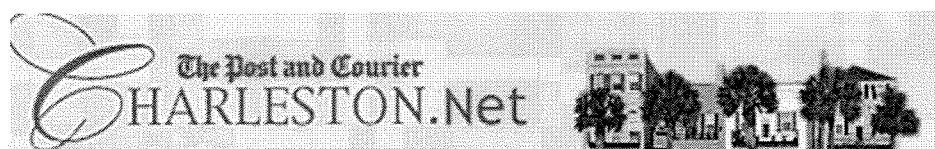
The motion to dismiss said that the \$192 million school construction package, approved by voters in 1999, allowed the district to renovate 15 schools and build two new ones to end discrimination in school buildings and construction.

The motion also said the Berkeley County district "has eliminated the historic pattern" of putting white teachers and administrators in mostly white schools and black teachers and administrators in mostly black schools.

The last area of concern was the renovation of Cainhoy Elementary/ Middle School, a rural school with a 90 percent black student population. The improvements are nearly complete. District officials sent pictures and other supporting documents to the Justice Department.

"That was the hinge toward getting the order," Bailey said.

Information from: The Post and Courier, <http://www.charleston.net>



New hope for lighthouse

Transferring title of the Morris Island Lighthouse to the state Budget and Control Board is expected to help the state overcome barriers to the landmark's restoration, supporters of the legislative plan contend. If so, it will be a welcome development for the project, which has been mired for months in a bureaucratic stalemate.

The Budget and Control Board -- whose members include the governor, the treasurer, the comptroller general and the chairmen of the two legislative finance committees -- clearly is in a better position to deal with the sticking points of project liability and possible cost overruns than the Department of Natural Resources.

Save the Light chairman Ernie Passailaigue points out that the Budget and Control Board also has more flexibility to settle the issues in a timely manner. "If you need something from the Legislature, you'll have to wait until next June," he says.

DNR officials have been unsuccessful in their attempts to convince the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to relent on their position that the state should have some liability for the project, and be responsible for cost overruns.

Caught in the middle of the dispute has been the Friends of the Light, which has taken the lead for the acquisition and restoration of the lighthouse. The citizens group has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the restoration project, but the impasse has stopped the flow of donations, as it halted the planned restoration.

The stalemate also has meant that the 138-year-old structure faces the prospect of another hurricane season that could see it toppled into the ocean. Transfer of the title, approved by the Legislature, should enable the project to go forward next spring, and the lighthouse stabilized by the beginning of hurricane season.

"We have spent months trying to unjam this thing," State Sen. Glenn McConnell, president pro tem of the Senate told our reporter. "Now we can see the light at the end of the tunnel."

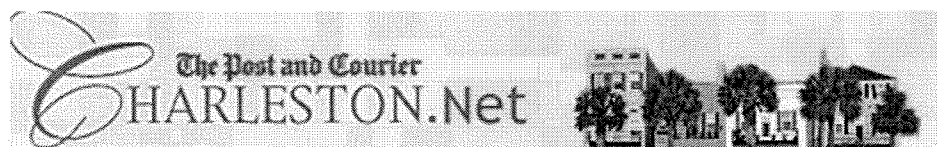
He added: "... Time is of the essence now, and we need to move as fast as we can to get all the contracts in place, the easements in place and make all the lawyers happy, so we can get around to the real work, which is to repair the foundation."

The Budget and Control Board should approach the problem with a sense of

urgency. The lighthouse, one of the state's most important and recognizable landmarks, can't wait indefinitely for stabilization and restoration to get under way.

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Silly stunt, but valid point

Gov. Mark Sanford hammed it up Thursday, drawing considerable media attention -- and considerable criticism from some state lawmakers. And though the governor should have a better way of expressing his budget differences with the Legislature than bringing a pair of piglets to the Statehouse, the basic budgetary point he was trying to make with those creatures -- he called them "Pork" and "Barrel" -- was valid.

The Associated Press reported that House Speaker David Wilkins of Greenville condemned the publicity stunt by his fellow Republican as "the worst kind of politics," explaining: "This is the people's house, it ought to be treated with dignity. I think he defiled it in order to get TV coverage." The overwrought House speaker added: "Obviously he doesn't have the same respect for this body as many of us do to bring livestock ... as we're seriously debating the people's business today."

Sen. Brad Hutto, D-Orangeburg, even labeled Gov. Sanford's ploy a crime that should result in charges of cruelty to animals and defacing the Statehouse -- in this case, with pig droppings.

The residue of the piglets' visit was quickly removed by a member of the governor's staff. Yet the residue of hard feelings between the governor and legislators -- again, including some in his own party -- looks likely to linger.

That's a shame. So was the House's Wednesday override of 105 of the governor's 106 budget vetoes, most of which were aimed at ensuring the state lives within its means.

Gov. Sanford had fumed at some of the Legislature's budgetary "gimmicks" - including his warning that if funds for a fire truck for a local government are somehow still hidden in the state budget he'll try to ensure it isn't spent.

But countering a budgetary gimmick with a political gimmick strikes us as more silly than funny, not to mention inappropriate. What's more, it needlessly fueled his enemies' fire, a definite political mistake.

However, it was no crime -- nor even "the worst kind of politics." It was a stunt. It didn't violate the Constitution or misspend taxpayer dollars.

Yes, Gov. Sanford should keep "Pork" and "Barrel" down on the farm. But the General Assembly should also keep pork out of the state budget.

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Avoiding a tax increase

Posted Thursday, May 27, 2004 - 9:58 pm

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*A tax increase would shore up
the school*

*district's finances, but taking
money*

*from reserves may be a better
option.*

The Greenville school board has raised taxes modestly every year since 1998. This year, thanks to a strengthening economy, the board may be able to avoid a tax increase. School trustees should thoroughly explore that possibility.

Greenville school trustee William Herlong, particularly, makes a strong case for forgoing a tax increase this year. Millage increases of the past few years have not only allowed the district to maintain strong academic standards but also have helped to build up the district's reserve fund.

That fund now stands at about \$30 million. Superintendent Dr. Phinnize Fisher proposed using \$2.1 million of that fund while raising taxes by 3 mills to fund the proposed \$332 million budget.

But trustees could also take \$5.5 million from the reserve fund, avoiding a tax increase altogether.

It's true, however, that taking money from the reserve fund carries some risk, as Herlong acknowledges. Trustees would be funding ongoing operations with one-time money — a practice that got state lawmakers into such deep trouble over the past few years. Using one-time money would mean that trustees would face a \$5.5 million deficit next year. However, it's reasonable — though not certain — to believe that the budget gap next year would be made up by an expanding economy that would provide increased tax revenues for the district.



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The district's fund balance also would drop below an ideal figure — at least 8.4 percent of the total budget, equivalent to one month's operating cost for the district.

Tax increases of the past few years could be justified at a time when state leaders were imposing brutal mid-year budget cuts on public schools. But mid-year budget cuts don't appear to be on the horizon for the coming year. That fact would make a tax increase less necessary.

Herlong has been a staunch advocate of building the district's reserve fund and would not recommend taking money from the fund without careful consideration.

Granted, a 3-mill tax increase would mean that trustees are not gambling on the strength of the future economy. It also would cost the owner of a \$125,000 home only about \$15 a year.

Dr. Fisher has put forth a sound budget that seeks to reduce class sizes slightly, reinstate in-school suspension and provide more money for library books and instructional supplies. Even with a tax increase, that budget would not completely mitigate the damage caused by three years of declining state support for schools.

If a tax increase can be avoided without causing the district undue financial hardship next year, trustees should forgo that increase. Greenville County residents should let their voices be heard on this issue both by contacting trustees directly and speaking out at the public hearing scheduled for June 10.



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Posted on Fri, May. 28, 2004



Pitts is the type of legislator we need

REP. TED PITTS RAN for the House in 2002 promising a more realistic, less partisan approach to government. In the two years since, he has worked across party and racial lines to help provide that; he has voted with fellow Republicans when he agreed with them, but has refused to fall into line when he disagreed.

He believes our state is poised for change, on such crucial issues as overhauling the tax code to provide adequate and equitable school funding and overhauling the government so the governor can carry out the agenda he's elected on. And he believes he can help our state make those changes, promising, not immodestly but probably accurately: "If you get enough people like me elected, you're going to see some change."

Too few legislators even talk like this; but Mr. Pitts does more: He backs up his talk with actions.

He was one of seven Republicans to support raising the cigarette tax last year and one of five who tried to force the issue this year, despite overwhelming resistance from GOP leaders. ("People were not pleased with that," he says. "When you start putting Republican names on it, that changes the tone.") He won't vote for extreme measures just to give the House bargaining power with the Senate, figuring that if the Senate happens to go along and the bad legislation becomes law, he would be responsible. He was one of just 24 representatives who voted to sustain the governor's veto of the pork-laden Life Sciences Act — and one of just 15 who defied House leaders to oppose passage.

David Spence, who is challenging Mr. Pitts for the northeastern Lexington County District 69 seat, seems sincere in wanting to serve in public office. He says he wants to reduce the partisanship at the State House, and he understands the importance of providing for public education. But he seems to offer little more than a commitment to constituent service. He says little that demonstrates any particular desire to tackle the specific problems that we need our Legislature to address, and when he does, he's squishy on how he would reconcile competing ideas he advocates.

That's not what we need right now. We need more legislators like Ted Pitts.

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Posted on Fri, May. 28, 2004



Jackson deserves another term

WHILE OTHERS FOCUS on education equity and tax reform and other important issues, Sen. Darrell Jackson has concluded that lawmakers will never make progress on any of that until they deal with an overarching problem — partisanship.

Mr. Jackson has been doing his part, finding issues where he can depart from the partisan track — most notably, his refusal to join with his party's leadership to support video gambling and the lottery.

Unfortunately, Mr. Jackson has also been part of another problem, as one of a handful of senators who have abused the Senate's rules to block consideration of all bills until he could get his way on one. Our state is going to have a hard time making progress until the Senate changes those rules, which is something Mr. Jackson's opponent, Eddie Sullivan, would like to do.

Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Jackson both want to repair a broken budgeting system and find a way to provide adequate resources to all of our state's schools, although Mr. Sullivan is more certain than Mr. Jackson that the key to both is overhauling our tax system.

But on a host of other issues, Mr. Sullivan is less certain about what he thinks. While he got into the race for the right reasons, he no longer seems enthusiastic about it. And then there's the topic of race: We reject the idea that only black legislators can represent black voters and only whites can represent whites, but as long as such a small portion of our legislators are black, a white candidate who wants to unseat a black incumbent needs to be ready to talk about how he might represent those constituents better. Mr. Sullivan seems never to have considered the issue.

Mr. Sullivan might turn out to be a good senator. But Mr. Jackson already is one, and he should continue. If he wants to be an even better senator, he should add his voice to those seeking to reform Senate rules.

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